



Vote 1 uberveillance: UOW term in running for 2008 Word of the Year

16 Jan 2009 | Kate McIlwain

uberveillance

(say 'oohbuhvayluhns)

noun. an omnipresent electronic surveillance facilitated by technology that makes it possible to embed surveillance devices in the human body. Also, überveillance.

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A word invented by UOW researchers has made it into the Macquarie Dictionary and, along with 91 other new words, is in the running to become the 2008 Macquarie Word of the Year.

The word *uberveillance* was coined in 2006 by UOW Honorary Senior Fellow Dr MG Michael and the concept has been further developed together with UOW senior lecturer Dr Katina Michael.

The first time the term was used by Dr Michael was in a guest lecture he delivered on the "Consequences of Innovation".

Drs Michael and Michael had been researching the trajectory of 'beneath-the-skin' surveillance technologies that could identify and locate individuals.

The duo said the word simply 'came out' in a moment of inspiration, when Michael was searching for words to describe the embedded technologies. They said the term "surveillance" didn't describe the full extent of the technological capabilities available today.

"Michael could find no other term but to bring together the German prefix "über" with the French root word "veiller" to describe the exaggerated surveillance conducted by governments in the name of national security," Dr Katina Michael said.

"Michael has always had an affinity with words from some earlier studies in linguistics and his success in having his poetry published in a number of Australia's major literary journals."

"We needed a word to describe the profoundly intrusive nature of such technologies and it was no longer about Big Brother looking down, but rather about Big Brother on the inside looking out," she said.

Some research concerning uberveillance has so far included studies on the privacy, trust and security implications of chip implants (e.g. Alzheimer's patients), the socio-ethical implications of pinpoint location based services, an exploration of the factors motivating 'underground implantees' to embed technology in their body; and looking at the trade-offs between privacy, value and control in radio-frequency identification applications like e-passports and e-tollways.

The term and associated research has attracted attention from the media and academic community in its three-year lifespan, but being put into the Macquarie Dictionary has special significance.

"To get it recognised in Australia's official dictionary was for us an absolute thrill," Dr Katina



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Michael said.

“It clearly evidences to the impact of our work... especially given the list of words is international and includes terms that have been in use for much longer.

“We do not know who nominated the word, or how it got onto the list, but it is without a doubt one of the outcomes we will hold as a major achievement,” she said.

2008 Word of the Year is awarded to the word that gains the most votes from the public – so Katina and Michael are urging UOW staff and students to log on, improve their vocabularies, and support UOW research.

How to vote:

1. Go to the Word of the Year page.
2. Click on VOTE NOW and scroll to the TECHNOLOGY tab.
3. Click on the *Ubervveillance* button.
4. Enter your email address.
5. Press submit.

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